

Pioneer Press, May 24, 2007

Officials from Cook and Lake County towns, including Northbrook, bracing for the onslaught of the emerald ash borer attended a summit on the Asian beetle Monday hosted by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park.

Officials from the Illinois and U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Illinois' Cook County Extension Office spoke at the meeting.

In Illinois, the emerald ash borer was first discovered in rural Kane County last June. Since, it's been found in Wilmette, Evanston and Winnetka.

Mark Cinnamon, a representative for the Illinois Department of Agriculture, said the insect may already be in other north suburban communities. "I expect we will find emerald ash borer scattered throughout the region."

Cinnamon said the peak emergence for the adult beetle is likely to be in early June.

The emerald ash borer is believed to have arrived in North America in wood-packing material that originated in China or Korea. The adult beetle is about a half-inch long and dark metallic green in color. Larvae feed on the inner bark of ash trees, eventually killing the trees.

The insect has killed more than 20 million ash trees in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia and Illinois thus far, with the greatest devastation in Michigan.

Although Glencoe Village President Scott Feldman reported his village has not found any infestations of emerald ash borer, he said he believes it's only a matter of time before the insect is detected, given that Glencoe borders Winnetka, where it's already been found.

"We can't stop this. We may be able to slow it down but we can't stop it yet," he said.

Since there's currently no effective treatment for the devastation the insect causes to ash trees, state and local officials are focusing efforts on controlling the insect population. That can mean cutting down infested trees to prevent the insect population's spread.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture plans to broadcast public service radio announcements this summer explaining how to identify the emerald ash borer. The department is urging residents not to move firewood or other wood products long distances, to prevent the accidental spread of the beetle.

Cinnamon said his department plans random surveys on a small percentage of ash trees throughout northeastern Illinois to determine new areas of potential infestation.

Kirk pledged to fight for more federal dollars to help state and local officials battle the pest. "The U.S. Department of Agriculture was appropriated \$10 million for quarantine and prevention efforts in 2007.

"We need to more than double that number if we are to stem the spread of the emerald ash borer," Kirk said. "Congress is considering lifting funding to \$30 million for 2008. I will work to help deliver these sorely needed funds to help our communities battle this dangerous pest."